

Transactions

JUNE/JULY 2005

TRANSPORTATION NEWS
FOR THE NINE-COUNTY
SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA



Update

New FasTrak™-only Lanes Open at Bay Bridge



FasTrak™ users now have exclusive use of the “mini-plaza” at the far right of the Bay Bridge toll plaza.

MTC and Caltrans have set aside three more lanes at the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge toll plaza for the exclusive use by motorists paying tolls with FasTrak™. The affected lanes pass through the “mini-plaza” to the far right of the main toll plaza, and primarily serve FasTrak™ users approaching the bridge from Interstate 880. Previously, motorists coming from Interstates 80 or 580 enjoyed easy access to two exclusive FasTrak™ lanes in the middle and far left of the toll plaza, while FasTrak™ users approaching the bridge from northbound Interstate 880 had to share lanes with motorists paying their tolls in cash.

The conversion of the three-lane “mini-plaza” to all-electronic payment is part of a continuing effort by MTC and Caltrans to increase FasTrak™ use on the Bay Area’s toll bridges.

“FasTrak™-only lanes can handle about three times as many vehicles per hour as lanes where drivers stop to pay cash,” explained Albert Yee, Deputy Director of Operations for Caltrans District 4.



Bay Area FasTrak™ Customer Service Center

Visit us at:
475 The Embarcadero (at Broadway)
San Francisco

Telephone (Toll Free):
877.BAY.TOLL (877.229.8655) or 511
(ask for FasTrak™ at the main menu)

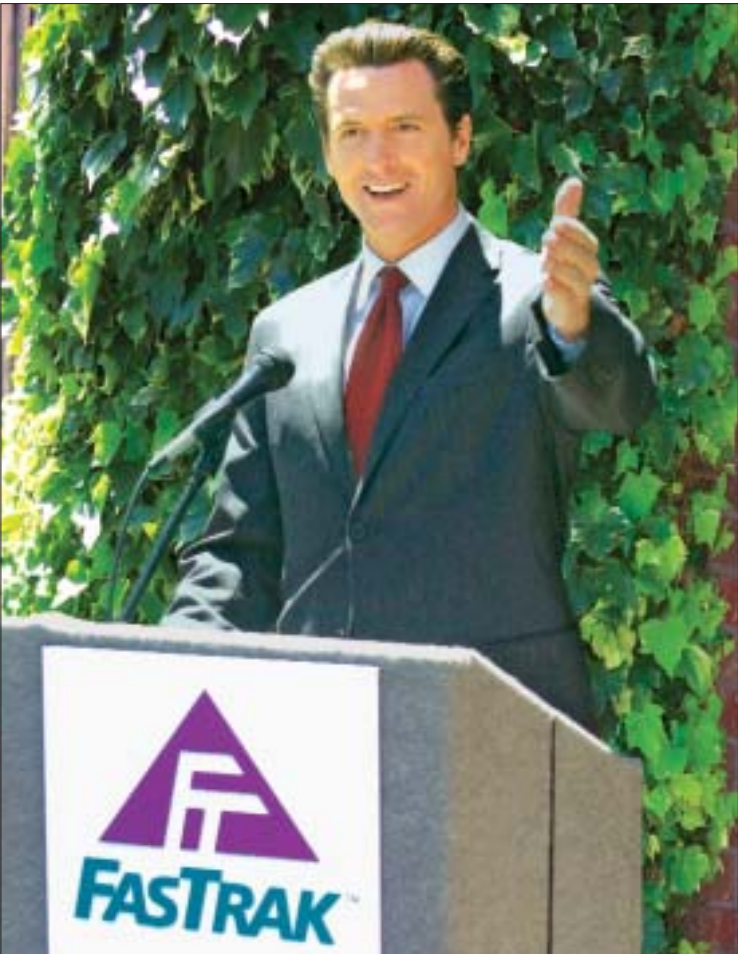
Hours of Operation:
Monday–Friday, 7 am to 7 pm
Saturday, 9 am to 1 pm

Agencies Team Up to Put Bay Area Bridge Travelers on FasTrak™

Paying bridge tolls electronically became more convenient and attractive for Bay Area drivers in June thanks to a trio of FasTrak™ improvements: a new customer service center, an improved Web site and more dedicated lanes.

MTC, Caltrans and the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD) officially opened their new joint FasTrak™ Customer Service Center, located along the Embarcadero in San Francisco, at a press conference in early June. On hand to help cut the ribbon was San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, who expressed his gratitude for the 50 new jobs that the center brings to the city. “I appreciate that technology and transportation are coming together,” he added.

The new center replaces separate facilities in Mill Valley and Concord that were managed, respectively, by the GGBHTD and by MTC in its role as the Bay Area Toll Authority. “Consolidating the FasTrak™ customer service centers into a single facility means greater efficiency for Bay Area motorists and allows all of the agencies to streamline administration and cut costs,” said MTC Executive



San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom welcomes the new FasTrak™ Customer Service Center at the press conference.

Director Steve Heminger.

To meet travelers’ needs any time of the day or night, the three



The new FasTrak™ Web site can be accessed at <www.511.org> or <www.bayareafastrak.org>.

agencies activated a versatile new Web site that not only allows new customers to apply online for a FasTrak™ transponder, but enables existing FasTrak™ customers to manage and review their

accounts 24/7. Visitors to the Web site also can access detailed information about the FasTrak™ program and the Bay Area’s eight toll bridges (including lane diagrams for each span), download various FasTrak™ forms, and resolve toll violation notices.

The three agencies also used the press conference to announce the conversion of the three far-right lanes at the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge toll plaza to FasTrak™-only lanes.

— John Goodwin

Free Morning Commutes on “Spare the Air” Days This Summer

What’s a present without wrapping? So when MTC and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District announced a gift to commuters in the form of free transit rides on smoggy days this summer and fall, they packaged their message appropriately. A line of buses gaily wrapped from nose to tail with blue skies and puffy clouds formed the backdrop at the late-May press conference where MTC and the Air District unveiled an expanded free-ride program as part of the annual “Spare the Air” campaign.

This year, MTC and the Air District are partnering with 21 transit operators across the nine Bay Area

counties to offer free morning rides during the first five weekday “Spare the Air” days in 2005. Passengers can take advantage of the free rides if they board a transit vehicle or enter a station between 4 a.m. and 9 a.m. on the designated days. The promotion started June 1, 2005, and ends on October 14, 2005, the close of the annual smog season. MTC is providing \$3.4 million from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program to subsidize the free rides.

Last year, MTC partnered with BART to offer free morning rides

on the regional rail system on the first five “Spare the Air” days. The pilot promotion drew 40,000 extra riders to BART over a two-day smog alert, and helped to avert violations of the federal ozone standard. Last year’s campaign was recognized in May 2005 with a Clean Air Award for Leadership in Air Quality Public Policy from the American Lung Associations of the Bay Area.

— John Goodwin & Brenda Kabn

Receive “Spare the Air” alerts by registering at <www.sparetheair.org>. Learn more about the “Free Morning Commute” promotion or plan your trip by visiting <www.511.org>.



Gaily wrapped buses herald the “Free Morning Commute” promotion.

Calendar

Unless indicated otherwise, all meetings take place at:
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter
Lawrence D. Dahms Auditorium
101 Eighth Street, Oakland
(Across from the Lake Merritt BART station)

MONDAY
AUGUST 1, 2005

10 am
Bay Area Partnership Board*
Nile Hall, Preservation Park
668 13th Street, Oakland

MONDAY
AUGUST 15, 2005

2 pm
TransLink® Operating Group
AC Transit, 10th Floor Conference Room
1600 Franklin Street, Oakland

THURSDAY
AUGUST 18, 2005

9:30 am
Regional Pedestrian Committee
MetroCenter, Conference Room 171

1 pm
Bicycle Working Group
MetroCenter, Conference Room 171

MONDAY
AUGUST 22, 2005

2 pm
TransLink® Management Group
Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority
3331 N. First Street, San Jose

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER 1, 2005

10 am
Elderly and Disabled Advisory Committee

FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER 9, 2005

9:30 am
Planning and Operations Committee*

10 am
Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways Operations Committee*

10:15 am
Legislation Committee*

MONDAY
SEPTEMBER 12, 2005

2 pm
TransLink® Operating Group
BART, 300 Lakeside Drive, Oakland

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 13, 2005

3:30 pm
Minority Citizens Advisory Committee

*Webcast on <www.mtc.ca.gov>.

Note: Dates, times and locations of MTC meetings may change. Please confirm by calling 510.464.7787. Agendas, updated meeting schedules and packets for MTC standing committees are posted on MTC’s Web site: <www.mtc.ca.gov>.

Facts & Figures

Report Gauges MTC’s Customer Service



The recently released 2004 Project Performance Report measures MTC’s success in delivering and managing a growing suite of traveler services: electronic fare payment (both the FasTrak™ toll collection system and the TransLink® transit fare smart card), traveler information (via the 511 phone line and Web site), incident management (call box network and Freeway Service Patrol roving tow truck fleet), ridesharing, and more. View online at <www.mtc.ca.gov/library/ppr/index.htm> or order a hard copy at <www.mtc.ca.gov/library/ord.htm>.

In the News Bike to Work Day 2005: The Day in Pictures



PHOTOS BY (LEFT TO RIGHT): JOE HENDRICKSON, NOAH BERGER, KIT MORRIS, DEB HUBSMITH, NOAH BERGER

The unseasonable rain notwithstanding, organizers of the Bay Area’s version of Bike to Work Day 2005 declared the event a success. This year’s effort was coordinated by the Bay Area Bicycle Co-alition and staffed by hundreds of local



volunteers — and underwritten by MTC to the tune of \$150,000. Sponsors revved up for the big day with a press conference in early May where 50 essay contest winners received new Giant-brand bikes courtesy of *Bicycling* magazine.

MTC also provided awards for a “Bike Commuter of the Year” in each of the nine Bay Area counties plus two regional awards: to the city of Petaluma for “Most Improved Bicycle Community” and to Agilent Technologies of Petaluma for “Best Workplace That Fosters Bicycle Transportation.”

MTC estimates that as many as 50,000 commuters pedaled to work on May 19, the official Bike to Work Day. Cyclists could refuel with free snacks and drinks at more than 180 “Energizer Stations” located along local bicycle commute routes around the region.

— Brenda Kahn

BikeMapper™ Debuts

Just in time for National Bike Month and Bike to Work Day, MTC added an interactive online bicycle mapping tool to its popular <www.511.org> traveler information Web site. The free 511 Bike Mapper™ contains data on more than 3,000 miles of bike routes in the nine-county Bay Area. The tool is part of MTC’s ongoing effort to promote bicycling as a viable option for more travelers. With BikeMapper™, the user plugs in the starting point and

endpoint, or just a city name, and the tool generates a map displaying all possible routes within that area. “This allows you to see all available options and decide for yourself which route to take,” said MTC planner Doug Johnson. The route lines are color coded to indicate whether they’re class I (off-street bicycle path), II (on-street bike lane) or III (on-street bike route). Among the innovative features is a “show slope” option that allows riders to identify bike routes with grades of

5 percent or more. A halo of red indicates hilly portions, with the color intensifying as the grade steepens. Users can zoom in and print the map. “511 BikeMapper™ will become even more powerful as time goes on,” said Johnson, explaining that some communities have not yet taken inventory of their bicycle facilities or have not mapped their bike paths, lanes and routes. “We’ll develop a richer database as more cities and counties take stock of their bikeways and start feeding



that data into 511.” The database also will expand as new bike paths are built, new on-street bike lanes are striped and additional streets are designated as bike routes.

— John Goodwin

Travel Times Displayed

Overhead freeway signs on Interstate 80 in the East Bay now show drivers the amount of time it will take them to reach downtown San Francisco, San Francisco International Airport, Oakland International Airport, the Carquinez Bridge, Fairfield or Novato. It’s part of a pilot program devised by Caltrans, MTC and the California Center for Innovative Transportation to create smart corridors where motorists can gauge the amount of time they will spend behind the wheel. For the past year, motorists have been able to access driving



“Smart” signs alert drivers on Interstate 80.

times on selected freeways via the 511 traveler information phone line and the companion Web site, <www.511.org>. The changeable message sign pilot program launched in May gives motorists another convenient avenue for accessing real-time traffic data. For the test phase, overhead signs have been activated at two Berkeley locations: University Avenue (for eastbound I-80) and Ashby Avenue (for westbound I-80). The system reads FasTrak™ transponders mounted on vehicle windshields. When traffic passes between two distinct points, the

average travel time between the points can be calculated and posted on the overhead signs for the benefit of other drivers. The westbound sign at Ashby Avenue provides motorists with real-time travel times to downtown San Francisco at 5th Street or the airports. The eastbound sign provides travel times to Fairfield, Novato or the Carquinez Bridge. Travel time information will be displayed every weekday between 5 a.m. and 9 p.m.; however, travel times can be superseded by messages about freeway incidents or Amber Alerts.

— John Goodwin

Commission Actions

April/May 2005

- Approved a plan for spending the \$27.3 million in Regional Measure 2 (RM 2) operating funds available in fiscal 2005–06, including \$1.8 million to beef up “owl service” along BART corridors. The money will fund the operation of new and existing bus lines during the late-night hours when BART is closed. Other highlights include \$8.6 million to cover Regional Express Bus operating expenses, \$3 million for enhanced bus service on the Telegraph-International Boulevard corridor, \$2.5 million to operate San Francisco Muni’s 3rd Street light-rail extension and \$5.7 million for interagency transit fare payment coordination through the TransLink® smart-card program. RM 2 funds are derived from a voter-approved \$1 toll hike that went into effect on the region’s state-owned bridges in July of 2004.
- Shifted \$15 million in state and federal funding to accelerate delivery of the Lifeline Transportation Program, which seeks to eliminate transportation gaps and barriers affecting low-income residents. Also adopted guidelines that delegate Lifeline Program administration to county-level congestion management agencies. **MTC Resolutions 3536-Revised, 3547-Revised, 3615-Revised, 3625-Revised and 3699**
- Adopted a resolution congratulating the Bay Area Air Quality Management District on the occasion of the agency’s 50th anniversary. In the words of the resolution, “Thanks in great part to the Air District’s efforts, Bay Area air quality has steadily improved over the past 50 years, with the data showing that 2004 was the cleanest year since the start of air quality monitoring in the 1960s — notwithstanding population growth of 2.3 million people and the addition of 2.5 million motor vehicles since 1969.” **MTC Resolution 3706**
- Acting as the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA), allocated \$36.3 million from project contingency funds for the new Benicia-Martinez span to keep construction moving forward in the face of unanticipated cost overruns. **BATA Resolution 49**

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